



Thea Stilton

AND THE
**CHERRY BLOSSOM
ADVENTURE**





HELLO, I'M THEA!

I'm *Geronimo Stilton's* sister.

As I'm sure you know from my brother's bestselling novels, I'm a special correspondent for *The Rodent's Gazette*, Mouse Island's most famous newspaper. Unlike my 'fraidy mouse brother, I absolutely adore traveling, having adventures, and meeting rodents from all around the world!

The adventure I want to tell you about begins at Mouseford Academy, the school I went to when I was a young mouseling. I had such a great experience there as a student that I came back to teach a journalism class.

When I returned as a grown mouse, I met five really special students: Colette, Nicky, Pamela, Paulina, and Violet. You could hardly imagine five more different mouselings, but they became great friends right away. And they liked me so much that they decided to name their group after me: the Thea Sisters! I was so touched by that, I decided to write about their adventures. So turn the page to read a fabumouse adventure about the

THEA SISTERS!

nicky

Name: Nicky

Nickname: Nic

Home: Australia

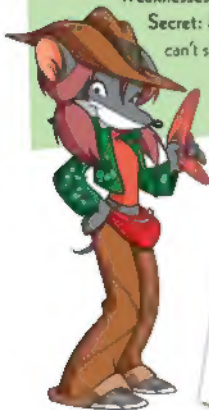
Secret ambition: Wants to be an ecologist.

Loves: Open spaces and nature.

Strengths: She is always in a good mood, as long as she's outdoors!

Weaknesses: She can't sit still!

Secret: Nicky is claustrophobic — she can't stand being in small, tight places.



COLETTE

Name: Colette

Nickname: It's Colette,
please. (She can't stand nicknames.)

Home: France

Secret ambition: Colette is very particular about
her appearance. She wants to be a fashion writer.

Loves: The color pink.

Strengths: She's energetic and full of great ideas.

Weaknesses: She's always late!

Secret: To relax, there's nothing
Colette likes more than a
manicure and pedicure.



VIOLET

Name: Violet

Nickname: Vi

Home: China

Secret ambition: Wants to become a great violinist.

Loves: Books! She is a real intellectual, just like my brother, Geronimo.

Strengths: She's detail-oriented and always open to new things.

Weaknesses: She is a bit sensitive and can't stand being teased. And if she doesn't get enough sleep, she can be a real grouch!

Secret: She likes to unwind by listening to classical music and drinking green tea.



PAULINA

Name: Paulina

Nickname: Polly

Home: Peru

Secret ambition: Wants to be a scientist.

Loves: Traveling and meeting people from all over the world. She is also very close to her sister, Marla.

Strengths: Loves helping other rodents.

Weaknesses: She's shy and can be a bit clumsy.

Secret: She is a computer genius!



PAMELA

Name: Pamela

Nickname: Pam

Home: Tanzania

Secret ambition: Wants to become a sports journalist or a car mechanic.

Loves: Pizza, pizza, and more pizza! She'd eat pizza for breakfast if she could.

Strengths: She is a peacemaker. She can't stand arguments.

Weaknesses: She is very impulsive.

Secret: Give her a screwdriver and any mechanical problem will be solved!



Geronimo Stilton

Thea Stilton

AND THE
**CHERRY BLOSSOM
ADVENTURE**



Scholastic Inc.

New York Toronto London Auckland
Sydney Mexico City New Delhi Hong Kong



A SPECIAL GIFT

It was a hot midsummer day. It was gorgeous outside, but I was trapped inside my mouse hole, scampering back and FORTH like a rat in a maze. I was waiting for a very **important** package, and the mailmouse was late!

You see, I am a special correspondent for The Rodent's Gazette. I'm always traveling for work, and I'm ready to leave for a new



ADVENTURE at the drop of a cheese slice. Waiting has never been my strong suit!

After what seemed like an eternity, Mercury Whale, the mailmouse from Whale Island, finally arrived. He always

brings me news from my dear friends, the **THEA SISTERS**. A few months ago, I was invited back to my alma mater, Mouseford Academy, to teach a course in adventure journalism.



That's how I met **Colette**, **Nicky**, **PAMELA**, **PAULINA**, and **Violet** — they were my students. After we solved a mystery together, the five mouselets decided to call themselves the **THEA SISTERS** in honor of our friendship. I am very proud of them!

Before Mercury even had a chance to **ring** the bell, I rushed to the door and threw it

open. "Finally!" I exclaimed, **beaming**.

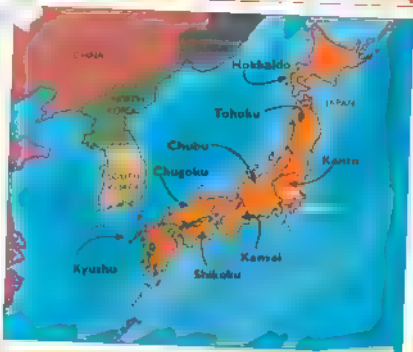
The poor rodent almost **JUMPED** out of his fur. He stammered, "M-Miss Thea, I came to give you this —"

"Package, yes, yes, I know!" I interrupted **impatiently**.

Mercury **seemed** stunned. "Uh . . . yes, but surely you don't know that it comes from —"

"From **JAPAN!**" I said, **CUTTING** him off. "And I know just what's inside. . . ."





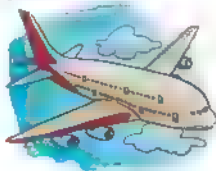
Japan is a country made up of many islands — some large and others very small — arranged in an arc east of the Asian continent.

Tokyo is the capital of Japan and is on the largest island of the archipelago. A good 13 million of Japan's 127 million inhabitants live there! Japan is rich with natural marvels, like forests, mountains, lakes, and volcanoes. The country is divided into eight regions, as shown on the map above.

In fact, *Colette*, *Nicky*, *PAMELA*, *PAULINA*, and *Violet* had already alerted me to the fact that a special *gift* would be arriving. They were all waiting for me at a big summer *FESTIVAL* in Japan! It'd been so long since I'd seen those five mouselets, I was more impatient than a cat with a mouse in its claws. I said a *QUICK* good-bye to Mercury, grabbed my *suitcase*, and scurried off to the airport.

But what was inside the package, you ask? Well, if you want to find out, you'll have to keep reading!

It all started with a special student exchange organized by **MOUSEFORD ACADEMY...**





JAPAN, HERE WE COME!

One bright spring day, a **MouseAir** plane was coming in for a landing in the faraway country of **JAPAN**.

Mouseford Academy had organized an **EXCHANGE** program with the famous Yoshimune Academy of Kyoto. The five **THEA SISTERS** had immediately volunteered to join the **TRAVELERS**. There was nothing those five **mouselings** loved more than visiting new places! They had been preparing for the trip for months, and their enthusiasm was **sky** high.

After a few layovers, they landed at the Osaka airport. From there, they were bound for Kyoto, one of the **oldest** cities in Japan.

"These are going to be the three most

FABUMOUSE months of our lives!" exclaimed Pam.

"I've been wanting to visit Japan since I was a wee mouseling!" Nicky agreed.

Paulina **FOLLOWED** them. She had her snout deep in her **TRAVEL GUIDE** to Japan. "We need to start **studying**, mouselings!" she said **ANXIOUSLY**. "We'll be taking



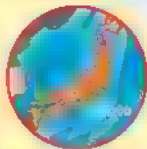
KYOTO

Region: Kansai

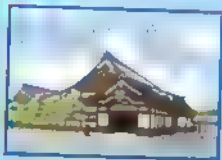
Prefecture: Kyoto

Population: Over 1.4 million

Features: The architectural treasures of Kyoto are world famous.



SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CITY



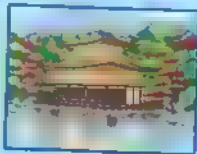
Nijo-jo (the Nijo Castle)

Built around 1600, this castle is a magnificent example of traditional Japanese architecture. Because of numerous fires over the years, the castle has been

partially rebuilt, but you can still admire the painted sliding doors and the inlaid wood.

Kinkaku-ji (the Golden Pavilion)

Kinkaku-ji was built near the end of the fourteenth century. It is nicknamed the Golden Pavilion because its top two stories are coated in gold leaf.



Kyoto was named Japan's capital by the emperor Kammu in 794 AD. It remained Japan's capital city until 1868, when the capital was moved to Tokyo. It's still possible to visit the striking imperial palace, called **Kyoto Gosho**, which rises in the center of the city. The palace is surrounded by a vast park.

Kyoto has a rich history, and it's filled with perfectly preserved monuments. Today it's one of the most famous tourist destinations in Japan.

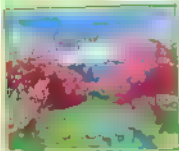
Karesansui (the rock gardens)

These splendid gardens were designed to express the ideas of harmony and peace through a precise placement of stones and moss. The stones are positioned on a stretch of sand or gravel, in which winding lines and concentric circles are traced. One of the most famous rock gardens in Japan can be found in Kyoto, at Ryoan-ji Temple.



Ohanami (cherry blossom viewing)

Ohanami is a tradition that dates from ancient times. Every year in early spring, the people of Japan gather for picnics to observe the beauty of the cherry blossoms (*sakura*).



classes like real Japanese **students**."

"Have no fear, I'll be here to help you!" **Violet** reassured her. "When I was a mouseling, I studied Japanese, and I still remember a lot."

"Thanks, Violet, or should I say . . . *arigato*!" **chirped** Colette, bowing deeply.

Professor **SPARKLE** and Professor **MARBLEMOUSE** were the chaperones for the Mouseford



* *Arigato* means thank you in Japanese.

group. They were very busy giving advice to all their students.

"At first, it might be **DIFFICULT** for you and the Japanese students to become friends, since you don't **speak** the same language," **WARNED** Professor Sparkle. "But after a little time studying together, you'll learn to understand each other!"

After scrambling to claim their luggage, the group from Mouseford **left** the airport. A bus with the Yoshimune Academy logo was waiting to take them to Kyoto. The **trip** lasted a little more than an hour. The five mouselets had their snouts **pressed** against the windows the whole time, pointing out **SIGHTS** to one another.

At **YOSHIMUNE ACADEMY**, Professor Nishikawa, the school's director, was standing in the center of the courtyard. Behind him, all the

teachers and the **students** were lined up. It was very **exciting** for the rodents of Mouseford!

After a long moment, Professor Nishikawa approached the **MOUSEFORD** professors, bowed, and **smiled**, shaking their paws. "On behalf of all the professors and students of Yushimune Academy, **welcome!**"

The Japanese mouselets **all** shouted, "**WELCOME TO JAPAN!**" Then the line of students broke down as everyone scurried to meet the new arrivals.



There was an **exchange** of names and greetings between the students of the two academies. When they couldn't understand each other with words, the students found other ways of **communicating**. From their pockets and pawbags, they pulled out **DIGITAL** music players, cameras, and the latest cell phones.

Director Nishikawa **winked** at his colleagues from Mouseford. "It really is true: **MOUSELINGS** are the same all over the world!"

The **bow** is a typical courteous Japanese greeting. It can convey many different things, including apology, gratitude, and respect. The longer and deeper the bow, the more respect it expresses for its recipient. For a casual hello among friends, a very slight bow is enough. But when asking for forgiveness, you must bow really deeply!







ONE OF US!

After this **warm** welcome, the moment had come to show **the** **guests** their dorm rooms.

A **gracious** mouseling in a school uniform approached the **THEA SISTERS** and made a **SLIGHT** bow. "Konnichiwa"! My name is **KUMI NAKAMURA**, and I will be your guide here **at the academy**." She had a **sweet** and sincere smile; the **THEA SISTERS** immediately liked her.

"Nice to meet you, Kumi!" said Nicky, giving her paw a **vigorous** shake. "My name is Nicky, and this is Pamela, Violet —"

Before she could finish squeaking, Kumi finished the list: "And these last two must be Colette and Paulina!"

The mouselets looked at one another in

* *Konnichiwa* means hello in Japanese.



surprise: Had the students of Yoshimune really *memorized* the names of their guests?

Kumi explained **immediately**. "I know your names because you are the **THEA SISTERS!** I've been so **eager** to meet you in the fur!"

Seeing the perplexed expressions on the

mouselets' snouts, Kumi added, "I have followed all of your adventures, thanks to Thea Stilton's **BOOKS**: She is a writer who really knows her **cheese**! You mouselets have become my idols! Come on, let me show you where you'll be staying here at the *academy*."

As they walked along the academy's corridors, Kumi continued **QUERKING** cheerfully. "The mystery you solved in Paris was really **exciting**! Not to mention Australia — that **mountain** you climbed was **incredible**!"

Pam stopped in her tracks. She'd been taken by a sudden idea. "Chewy cheesecake with **CHOCOLATE** on top! Since Kumi knows us so well, why don't we make her an honorary Thea Sister?"

"YESSSSS!" *Colette, Nicky,*

PAMELA, ~~ANITA~~, and Violet agreed. They gathered around, **smiling** at their new friend, who looked happy and a bit **overwhelmed**.





SUMMER FESTIVAL!

The students from Mouseford had the remainder of the **DAY** to rest and get adjusted. **Colette**, **Tuesday**, **PAMELA**, **PAULINA**, and **Violet** decided to pass the time with their new friend **KUMI**.

Violet was **curious**. "You know everything about us; now tell us something about you!"

"That seems only fair," said Kumi. "Well, if you really want to get to know me . . . come with me!"

The five mouselets **FOLLOWED** Kumi through the academy's many **long corridors**. Finally, Kumi flung open a shiny red door.

"This is my favorite place in the entire world!" she **squeaked** with excitement.

The mouselings found themselves in a





room filled with colorful paintings, ribbons, fabric swatches, scissors, colored pencils, paints, other art materials of all kinds, and mannequins covered with glittering fabric.

"This is the Art and Dance Club," Kumi explained. "Here at Yoshimune, we take traditional dance classes, but we also have a club that organizes shows, exhibits, and concerts. This year, I'm the president!"

The THEA SISTERS LOOKED around with their eyes open wide.

"I've studied traditional Japanese dance since I was very young," Kumi continued, "but I also know ballet and modern dance. My dream is to bring the richness of other cultures to Japan. I want to unite the rodents of the world through dance!"

Kumi's EYES shone as she squeaked.



The **THEA SISTERS** immediately understood that in front of them stood a very **SPECIAL** mouse.

Suddenly, another student burst into the room like a *whirlwind*. "Kumi! I've finally found you!" Then she noticed the others and added **coldly**, "Oh, I didn't realize you brought company."

Kumi didn't seem to notice the girl's sudden **CHANGE** of tone. Kumi introduced the **THEA SISTERS** to her good friend Sakura.



Sakura gave a **courteous** smile and a very slight bow. Then she turned back to Kumi as if the **THEA SISTERS** weren't there. "I've been looking for you forever! We need to work on the yosakoi, remember?"

"Of course!" exclaimed Kumi, **SLAPPING** her paw against her cheek. She turned to the **THEA SISTERS**. "I would love to show you!"

Sakura **gasped**. "But they can't . . ."

"Well, why not?" responded Kumi.



"Excuse me, but what is this yosi-thingy?" Colette asked.

"It's a **fabumouse** summer festival!" Kumi **burst out** enthusiastically. "Every year, hundreds of people get together to **DANCE** through the streets of the city of Kochi, on Shikoku Island!"

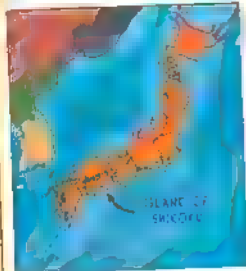
"This year, Kumi and I are in charge of the **choreography** and the **COSTUMES**," Sakura added **proudly**. "Our academy has participated since the very first year."

"Ooooh, can we help? **PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE?**" begged Colette.

Kumi nodded **enthusiastically**. "Sure!

CHOREOGRAPHY

Choreography is the art of creating and directing dance steps and movements in sequence. It comes from two ancient Greek words: *khoreia*, which means "dancing in unison," and *graphia*, which means "writing."



YOSAKOI MATSURI

In Japan, the changing of seasons through the course of the year is an occasion for fun and colorful festivals, called **matsuri**, which take place in different regions of the country.

The **Yosakoi Matsuri**

takes place on the island of Shikoku every August. It was organized for the first time in 1954. During the festival, large groups of people parade around the city, dancing the traditional **yosakoi naruko** to a tune called "Yosakoi-bushi." The rhythm of the music is kept by castanets called **naruko**, which farmers used in ancient times to shoo away crows from their crops.

Today, each group can create their own costumes, music, and choreography for the yosakoi. There are only three rules that must be respected:

- 1) Each group must have 150 people or fewer.
- 2) Everyone must use **naruko** clappers.
- 3) The "Yosakoi-bushi" must be used in at least part of each group's musical arrangement.

You can help make the **COSTUMES**. . ."

"And I can help with your musical arrangement!" proposed Violet.

Nicky began to **JUMP** up and down like a kangaroo. "Hooray! I'll find someone to lend me a guitar. That way we can play a duet, Vi!"

"I know some **DANCE** moves that will loosen you up! I can **teach** you if you want," added Pam *earnestly*.

The mouselets were all in agreement: They'd go back to their rooms to freshen up from their flight. Then, that very afternoon, they would visit the city to shop for materials for the *festival*.

The only one who didn't seem enthusiastic about the way things were going was Sakura, who began to **SULK**. She found an excuse not to join the group.

Less than an hour later, Kumi **knocked** on the door of the **THEA SISTERS'** room. Paulina went to open it . . . and almost didn't recognize her! "But . . . but . . . Kumi, **is that really you?!**"

Kumi was dressed in colorful clothes instead of her school uniform. And her fur



was full of multicolored barrettes and **shiny** clips!

Colette scurried over to admire her close-up. "Wow! Kumi, you look amazing! Where did you get those boots? They are **fabumouse!**"

"Well, thanks," Kumi said, **blushing**. "The uniform is fine for school, but when we're heading off **CAMPUS**, we can dress as we like!"

Pam was **enthusiastic**. "I'm really starting to like it here! If I like the food as much as everything else, I'll have no problem giving up **Pizza** for three months!"

The mouselets **grinned** at each other. Their adventure in Japan was off to a super start!



A MYSTERIOUS PHONE CALL

That first afternoon went by in a **FLASH**, and the next few days were very busy. In the mornings, **Colette**, **Nicky**, **PAMELA**, **PAULINA**, and **Violet** took classes with their schoolmates at Yoshimune Academy. In the afternoons, they **RACED OFF** to help **KUMI**.

Sakura participated in the preparations for the **Yosakoi festival**, but she seemed less enthusiastic about the **THEA SISTERS** than a cat on a rodent-free diet.

After two weeks of study, the *professors* decided to give



SAKURA

the students some **FREEDOM**: four days of fun with their new **JAPANESE** friends!

"Sakura and I have organized everything. We're going to take you on an unforgettable trip!" Kumi promised her new friends.

Their first stop was the **HOT SPRINGS** of Kurama, near Kyoto, with an overnight stay in a real Japanese *onsen ryokan*!

The mouselets agreed to meet up the next morning at the Kyoto train station.

"This **station** is like a city inside the

ONSEN RYOKAN

An *onsen* is a hot spring, or a place where water runs from the ground at a very high temperature. In Japan there are more than three thousand hot springs, and the Japanese love to visit them. The hot baths tone the body and relax the mind. Sometimes the *onsen* are connected to small inns called *ryokan*.

city!" exclaimed Paulina, looking around in **wonder**.

Escalators packed with rodents ran up and down to different levels. On every floor were shops and restaurants, and there was even a **theater**!

"Hurry up! We'll miss the train!" Sakura called to Paulina and Nicky, who couldn't stop taking **P I C T U R E S**.



The train ride lasted only thirty minutes, but the **VIEW** from the mouselings' **WINDOW** changed as soon as they left the city. Glass and **CEMENT** were immediately replaced with majestic green **MOUNTAINS** and patches of colorful **flowery** shrubs.

Pam could hardly pry her **snout** from the window. "Now it seems like we're on another planet!" she exclaimed.

"You're right, Pam!" confirmed Kumi. "These extremes of country and city are part of Japanese **culture**. We love the **TREASURES** and traditions of our past,



but we also have our eyes pointed toward the **FUTURE**."

Soon they arrived at **KURAMA**, an *enchanting* town with colorful streets. It was filled with fancy shops and tiny two-story wooden houses.

For that evening, the mouselets had reserved a room with an outdoor **POOL** at the *onsen ryokan*. After changing out of their travel things, they immersed themselves in hot water, watching the vapors rise toward the sky, which was fading into a gorgeous red **sunset**.

Surrounded by the peacefulness of the forest, the mouselings immediately relaxed. They **chatted** about everything.

Right after the bath, the mouselets had a big Japanese dinner in the hotel dining room.

"That was **whisker-licking** good,"

sighed Pamela, patting her belly.

Just then, Kumi's cell phone rang. She looked at the small screen for a moment, and a **WORRIED** expression crossed her **snout**. She excused herself and hurried from the room before answering.



Colette followed her with her eyes. "Something here smells **STINKIER** than old blue cheese. **mouselings!**"

"Of course something stinks!" Sakura snapped. "I guess Kumi hasn't filled you in."



THE PUPPET THEATER

Sakura looked smug. She seemed **pleased** to know something they didn't. "Kumi wants to enroll in the special **DANCE** and theater production school in Paris —"

"Yes, we know!" interrupted Colette, a bit **sharply**.

"Kumi has great talent!" added Paulina.

Sakura nodded, then grew **SERIOUS**. "But surely you don't know that her father is a **great** master of the Bunraku theater. He wants Kumi to continue the family tradition instead of going to dance school."

"The Bunraku theater is the puppet theater, right?" asked Violet.

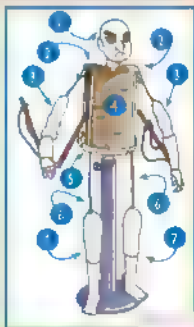
BUNRAKU:

Bunraku is a type of classic theater that was developed in Japan during the Heian period (794 to 1185 AD). It's also known as **ningyo joruri**: **Ningyo** means "doll" or "marionette," and **joruri** is a story that is sung with accompaniment by a three-stringed instrument called a **shamisen**.

Every Bunraku troupe is composed of puppeteers, a shamisen player, and a narrator, or chanter (**tayu**). The marionettes are about two-thirds the size of a person and are made with great care.

BUNRAKU MARIONETTES

- 1 Head
- 2 Shoulders
- 3 Arms
- 4 Torso
- 5 Ring of bamboo that forms the hips
- 6 Ropes
- 7 Legs



THE JAPANESE MARIONETTE THEATER



The main puppeteer, called **omozukai**, moves the head and the right arm of the marionette. The first assistant, or the **hiderizukai**, moves the left arm, while the second assistant, the **ashizukai**, moves the legs or the long costumes of the characters. The **omozukai** is the only one who can show his face; the assistants must wear hoods. The most important role is that of the narrator, known as the **tayu**, who sings with the notes of the **shamisen** player and tells the story. The **tayu** must be able to create the atmosphere of the drama with his or her voice and must make each character and his or her emotions unique.

"You mean like puppets . . . for **young mouselings**?!" asked Pam in surprise.

Sakura smiled scornfully. "You don't understand. Bunraku is an ancient art, the only one like it in the world!"

"The Bunraku marionettes are special," explained Violet. "They are very large, and three rodents **maneuver** each puppet."

"Well, we know **that** Kumi deeply respects **tradition**," Nicky replied. "But her dreams are important, too!"

Sakura's eyes flashed with **ANGER**. "Do you think I don't know that?! We've tried to reason with her father a **THOUSAND** times, but he has decided that Kumi should become an *omozukai*, like him. Surely you don't think you five mice will be able to change his mind!"

With that, she turned and **STOMPED** out of the room.

There was a long pause. Then Pam burst out, "She sure has her whiskers in a *twist!*"

The other mouselings all laughed. Pam always knew how to break the **TENSION**. But soon the mood grew serious again.

"Maybe we won't be able to change her father's **MIND**, but we must do everything we can to **SUPPORT** Kumi!" Violet declared.

"That's right, Vi!" agreed Nicky. "That's what friends are for."





ON THE SHINKANSEN!

The next day, the mouselets left bright and early. Their destination: **TOKYO**!

They were going to travel on the famous Shinkansen superexpress **train**. The sleek and ***superfast modern*** train would take them to **TOKYO** — almost 250 miles away — in only two hours and twenty minutes!

SHINKANSEN

Japan's high-speed train line is called Shinkansen. It is sometimes referred to as the bullet train, because the express trains on this line can reach speeds of 186 miles per hour, allowing them to connect the major cities of Japan in record time.

Some of the trains have very **unusual** names: **NOZOMI** ("hope"), **HIKARI** ("light"), and finally, **KODAMA** (a traditional name for the spirits of the woods).

Paulina read her **TRAVEL GUIDE**. "We'll be traveling on a train that runs on the Nozomi service. *Nozomi* means 'HOPE!'"

Kumi saw the **puzzled** expression on Pamela's snout and **winked** at her. "Don't worry, Pam — it's the fastest train, and it's always **on time!**"

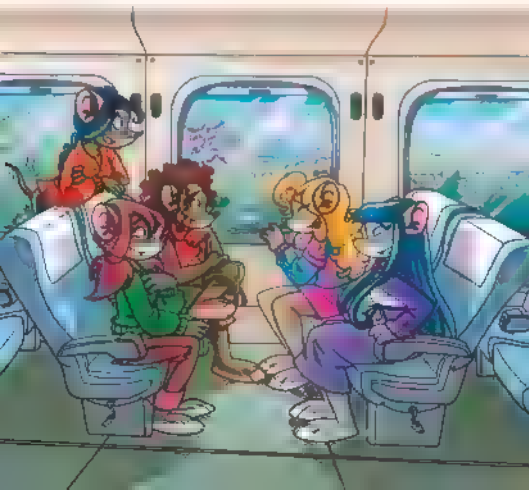
Pam **grinned**. "So instead of 'hope,' maybe they should have called it 'certainty.'"

Everyone **BURST OUT** laughing. Kumi was in a good mood again, and the **THEA SISTERS** thought it best not to ask any questions about the previous night.

The train left **right on time**, and soon Kyoto was far behind them.

"Look, it's **Mount Fuji!**" exclaimed Kumi, pointing out the window.

The **THEA SISTERS** turned. Before their eyes appeared an **enchanting** sight: the



mountain **stretching** toward the sky. Its sides reached gently up to its slightly flattened top, which was covered with **snow**. The mouselings were **AWESTRUCK** by the incredible sight . . .

... AND THEY WERE JUST
AT THE BEGINNING
OF THEIR FABUMOUSE
JAPANESE ADVENTURE!



A TOKYO FOR EVERYONE!

Tokyo left the mouselets **breathless**: Everything was **RICH** with light and **COLOR**, that they'd never imagined!

"Welcome to the city where anything is **POSSIBLE**!" exclaimed Kumi.

Sakura pointed out the subway entrance to the **THEA SISTERS**. "Well, there's lots and lots to **see**, so you should really get going."

"Are you **kidding**, Sakura?! We will be their guides!" declared Kumi, ignoring Sakura's **disappointed** expression.

Colette had very clear ideas about what she wanted to see. "I read somewhere that there's a **HUGE** neighborhood with all the latest **fashions**!"

"That's right, the **famouse** Shibuya neighborhood," confirmed Kumi. "You're going to **love** it, Colette!"



"My book says there's also an entire area dedicated to new **TECHNOLOGY!**" added Paulina.



"Uh-huh, that's Akihabara, where we'll find all the latest gadgets!" Kumi **smiled** with satisfaction: She knew each of the mouselings' favorite things to do! For Violet, she'd planned a tour of **MUSEUMS** and the charming **historic** district of Asakusa. For Pamela, she thought of the **color's** and the rhythm of the Harajuku district. And finally, for Nicky, there was the **natural** beauty of Ueno Park!



THE THEA SISTERS in TOKYO!

WHAT A DREAM
CAME TRUE!



LOOK AT THOSE
ENDORMOUSE
LANTERNS!



HARAJUKU

SHIBUYA

SO MANY EMO
BOUTIQUES!





UENO PARK

ASAKUSA

AKIHABARA

TOKYO
TOWER

IT'S TIME FOR
"JAPANESE CULTURE"

THEY HAVE
EVERYTHING HERE!

WHAT A
GORGEOUS DAY!

Over the next two days, the **THEA SISTERS** threw themselves into an exhausting but exciting tour. They didn't want to miss even the tiniest corner of that **FABULOUSE** city!

Sakura followed them grudgingly. She complained constantly about the **HEAT**, the crowds, and how much her paws **ached** from all the scurrying about. In short, she was the only one not having fun!

By the **afternoon** of the second day, the mouselings **had explored** most of the city from top to bottom. That was when **KUMI** brought them to a very special place.

"This is one of the most popular hangouts for **YOUNG mice** like us!" she explained, pointing to the entrance of a **BUILDING** covered in **neon** lights.

"But, Kumi. **this** is *our* karaoke shop!" protested Sakura.

"**Karaoke shop?!**" said Pam. "So it's a store for . . . karaoke?"

"More or less," said Kumi with an air of mystery. "You'll see: It will be **really fun!** Come on, follow me."

Kumi scampered into the shop, said hello to the mouse behind the counter, and headed **straight** toward a side door.

The **THEA SISTERS** followed her **curiously**.



KARAOKE

Karaoke is a favorite pastime in Japan. All you need is a well-known song, a microphone, a screen for the lyrics, and your voice! Inside a karaoke shop, you can find rooms equipped with the most modern lighting and music systems. You can stay there for hours, singing with your friends. You can even order lunch or dinner.

A moment later, they found themselves in a room without windows. It was furnished with couches, tables, and a **HUGE** screen on the wall.

KUMI made sure all her friends were comfortable. Then she flipped a switch. Suddenly, the room was filled with **FLASHING** neon colors. The screen **lit up**, and music started to **BLAST** through hidden loudspeakers.

Pam picked up a microphone.

"All right, mouselings . . . time to get in touch with our inner divas! Let's squeak our hearts out!!!"





A NEW FRIEND

Sakura had a sullen **pout** on her snout. She didn't want to sing, **and** she even began **YAWNING**! It wasn't that she was tired; she was just **JEALOUS** of the attention Kumi was paying the **THEA SISTERS**.

So after a while, Sakura **decided** to go back to the hotel. But as soon as she was outside the karaoke shop, she got an **IDEA**. She took out her cell phone and **sent** a quick **text message**.

Kumi is in Tokyo! she typed, and left the address of the karaoke shop. Then she scampered away, more satisfied than a cat who had swallowed a canary.

When the mouselings **LEFT** the shop an hour later, someone was waiting for them

outside: a tall blond rodent with a **gentle** air. As soon as he spotted Kumi, he waved.

Colette saw him first. "Hey, Kumi, there's a mouse over there who seems to know you."

"That's **Holger**, a dear friend of mine from **SWEDEN!**" Kumi exclaimed.

Holger approached the group of mouselings. He looked a bit awkward.



"Hey there, **Holger!**" Kumi said **cheerfully**.
"Have you come to sing karaoke, too?"

The blond mouse shook his snout. "I'm here for you, Kumi. Didn't you know?"

KUMI'S expression changed. "But how did you know where to find me?" Then she realized the **THEA SISTERS** were watching, and she hurriedly introduced the new arrival. "**Holger** is a real Bunraku theater **ARTIST**, and for many years he has been my father's most faithful assistant."

Holger shook paws with the mouselings a bit **stiffly**. Then he turned back to Kumi. "Your father heard you're in Tokyo. He would like to invite you and your **friends** to an evening dedicated to true Japanese **TRADITIONS**."

You see, it was Kumi's father that Sakura had **texted**!

Violet could tell at once that the invitation made Kumi feel **uncomfortable**. So she quickly piped up, "We will be happy to come with you, Kumi!"



"It will give you an opportunity to show your friends the *cherry blossoms*," Holger added, bowing to the **THEA SISTERS**. "If you haven't seen them already, that is . . ."

"The cherry blossoms!" Paulina squeaked excitedly, pulling out her **TRAVEL GUIDE**. "Yes! I've been longing to see them, and I think that's the only thing we haven't crossed off our to-do list!"

Kumi **HESITATED** for a moment, but when she looked around at the *mouselings*, they were all smiling and nodding. She was convinced. "Okay, let's go!"



A STRANGE MOUSE

After a short subway **trip**, the mouselings and **Holger** reached Kumi's family's home. The **neighborhood** was inside a beautiful park. All the houses were made of **WOOD**, built in a traditional style, and surrounded by luxurious **gardens**. But the **streets** didn't have any names: If Holger and Kumi



hadn't been there, the **THEA SISTERS** would never have found the Nakamuras' house!

"Here in **TOKYO**, only a few streets have names," explained Kumi, **smiling**.

Nicky was **SHOCKED**. "It must be hard to be a mailmouse around here!"

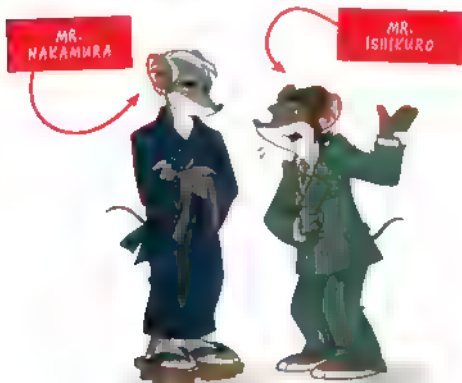
As they headed down the lane to Kumi's house, they noticed a tall mouse with a serious air standing out front. He was



wearing a *kimono** and talking to a very **SKINNY** rat dressed in a business suit.

"The one in the **KIMONO** is my father," said Kumi.

The conversation between the two rodents seemed very **ANIMATED**, so the little group



* A kimono is a type of traditional Japanese clothing.

waited before approaching Kumi's father.

The rodent in the suit seemed **annoyed**.
"Be reasonable. . . . You know that the show needs funds this year," they heard him say.

Kumi's father **shook** his snout, looking serious. "I know you are squeaking in good faith, but without the **princess** there can be no show!"

"But I *insist*! Please accept **my** offer; it's more than **generous**." All at once the rodent in the suit noticed the mouselings and Holger, and he fell silent.

The **THEA SISTERS** exchanged **perplexed** looks: It seemed as though their arrival had interrupted a very important and very **PRIVATE** conversation!

"Mr. Nakamura, Mr. Ishikuro, may I introduce **Colette**, **Nicky**, **PAMELA**, **PAULINA**, and **Violet**," said Holger politely.

CLUE!



Mr. Nakamura greeted the **mouselings** with a deep bow, but the expression on his snout was **SERIOUS**.

Mr. Ishikuro gave a very shallow bow. Then he turned to leave. "Well, Kumi, maybe you will be able to reason with your father!" he said. "He is **STUBBORN**, but we shall see who has the **LAST SLICE** of cheese!" He bowed once more and climbed into a **black limousine** parked at the end of the lane.

"He was in such a **HURRY** to leave!" Paulina **observed** under her breath.

The other mouselings had gotten the same impression. They nodded **thoughtfully**.



Who is Mr. Ishikuro, and what "princess" was he talking about?



THE ROOM OF WONDERS

As soon as Mr. Ishikuro had gone, Mr. Nakamura turned to Kumi and the **THEA SISTERS**. "Come in, and **WELCOME!** These days, Tokyo is all about everything that's new and foreign, but here you can taste the flavor of real **JAPANESE** traditions!"

The mouselets bowed **politely**. Then Kumi's father asked Holger to accompany them to a room where they would be able to **freshen up** and prepare for the evening.

The **THEA SISTERS** were a bit **SURPRISED** by Mr. Nakamura's welcome, which was polite, yet



distant. The **mouselets** were all **wondering** the same thing: What had Mr. Ishikuro been **discussing** with Kumi's father? Who was the **princess**?

Kumi and Holger exchanged glances: The moment had come for explanations.

Holger gestured for the **mouselets** to follow him down a corridor between **SLIDING** doors. He led Kumi and the **THEA SISTERS** into a great room reserved for Bunraku puppets.

The mouselets could hardly believe their eyes: Along the walls were many **splendid** puppets, including warriors in **ARMOR**, fine ladies with **complicated** and sparkling hairdos, and **FUNNY** characters with **SCARY** faces.

The **THEA SISTERS** looked around in wonder. **Holger** smiled, pleased. "Mr.



Nakamura is a master of Bunraku," he explained. "His school is one of the most important in the country! Unfortunately, these days Bunraku attracts fewer and fewer **spectators**. We get by only thanks to donations from foundations."

"And from wealthy people who are **passionate** about Bunraku, like Mr. Ishikuro!" Kumi added.

Holger **nodded**. "These puppets are of great value, but the real Nakamura family treasure is the one we call the **princess**: a marionette that dates back to the very first Bunraku companies! Mr. Ishikuro came from his home near Kyoto just for her."

"Oooh!" exclaimed Violet, impressed.

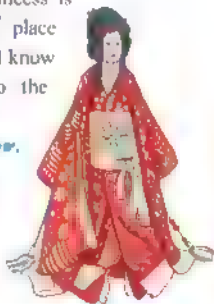
Colette **ELBOWED** her friend, asking under her breath. "We are talking about a long, **LONG** time ago, right?"

Violet **nodded**. "That's right, Colette! The princess is about **FOUR HUNDRED** years old!"

"**AMAZING!**" commented Pam. "So, can we check out this **ANCIENT** relic? She sounds cool!"

Kumi **shook** her snout regretfully. "No, I'm afraid not. The princess is hidden in a **SECRET** place that only my father and I know about. She's shown to the public only once a year."

"For Kumi's **father**, the princess represents the **SPIRIT** of Bunraku," added **Holger** seriously. "He would *never* agree to sell her!"



The Princess

CLUE!



Paulina began to understand the **strange** conversation they'd overheard. "Oh, I **get it**.

So Mr. Ishikuro would like to buy the **princess**."

"Exactly!" Holger said. "Mr. Ishikuro is an **OLD** family friend, and he has always helped us, but **MONEY** is not enough to keep tradition alive. You also need study and **PASSION**."

The **THEA SISTERS** smiled. Mr. Nakamura's Swedish apprentice seemed to love the Bunraku theater just as much as a native **JAPANESE** rodent!

When **Holger** noticed their looks, he



Mr. Ishikuro wants the precious princess marionette, but Kumi's father has no intention of selling her.

blushed from the tip of his snout to the tip of his tail.

KUMI came to his rescue. "Now come on, **mouselings**. We need to get ready for the **TEA** ceremony."





THE TEA CEREMONY

Holger accompanied the mouselings to another room. "You can change in here, but please be **quick** about it!"

"Change?!" replied Colette, alarmed. "But I don't have anything to wear! Not for a *ceremony*!" She was a big believer in being dressed **appropriately** for every occasion.

"Don't worry, Colette. My father has thought of everything!" Kumi said, reassuring her. She pawed her friend a very **soft**, light package.

Colette lifted up the paper wrapping. Inside was precious **embroidered** fabric. With sparkling eyes, she quickly revealed her new garment: a splendid pink *yukata**!

"**Look!** There's one for each of us!" noted Violet. "The **COLOR** are *perfect* for us!"

* A yukata is a lightweight kimono.

With Kumi's help, the mouselings tried on their outfits. They completed their new looks with hair **ornaments**, belts, white socks, and lovely traditional **WOODEN** sandals, which took some practice walking in.

Hulger passed by to call them; He had also changed, and looked elegant in his *traditional* outfit. He led them to a small waiting room near the *garden*, where Kumi's father would meet them.



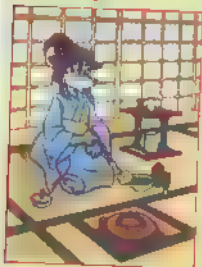
In his dark kimono, Mr. Nakamura seemed even more **AUTHORITATIVE** and severe, but when he saw the mouselets, a **bright** smile crept onto his **snout**. "I am happy that you liked my gifts. Now, if you would **follow me . . .**"

"Oh, thank you! I **love** tea, especially with lemon" commented Colette with a giggle, but she stopped when she noticed a flash of **DISAPPROVAL** cross Mr. Nakamura's snout.

"The **TEA** ceremony is very ancient, and different from how it is in the West!" Paulina whispered. "I **read** in my guidebook that it can be pretty complicated. Let's hope we don't mess up."

"Don't **WORRY**. Just do what I do and everything will be fine!" Kumi said, **REASSURING** them.

They washed their paws in a **STONE** basin along the walkway. Then they passed through a small doorway and found



THE TEA CEREMONY

The tea ceremony is one of the oldest traditions in Japanese culture. The whole ceremony lasts about four hours and involves a complex ritual, during which the invited guests eat a seven-course meal and drink two different types of **matcha** tea.

Sometimes only the final part of the ceremony is performed. It lasts no more than an hour and requires only one type of tea to be prepared.



themselves in the tearoom. It was **simple** but **HARMONIOUS**.

Kumi's confident gestures, combined with the quiet atmosphere, had a calming effect on the **THEA SISTERS**, who were able to relax and appreciate the **ancient** ritual. As for Kumi's father, he observed the mouselets' courteous behavior with **SATISFACTION**.

When the ceremony was **OVER**, it was already evening. "I would be very **honored** to show you the wonders of our country," Mr. Nakamura proposed.

"*Ohanami!*" exclaimed Kumi radiantly. "You **absolutely** cannot miss this, mouselings!"

Mr. Nakamura **looked** at his daughter affectionately. He gave her a sweet **smile**. "Good! Kumi, let's take our guests to discover the *yozakura*!"

"Ooh!" Violet squealed. "He means it's time for our *cherry blossom* tour," she explained to her friends.

Paulina nodded. "Japan's cherry blossoms are legendary for their beauty." She bowed to Kumi and her father. "It is our honor to have you as our guides and hosts!"



Ohanami means "to observe the blossoming of the flowers." Weather forecasts predicting the blooming of the flowers are watched carefully, since the blossoms last only a week or two.

From the end of March to the beginning of May, when the cherry and plum trees are in bloom, many people gather in parks to celebrate with a picnic. The festivities continue even into the night, when *ohanami* becomes the *yozakura* celebration.

The blossoming of the cherries has become a symbol of tranquility — of the peaceful internal state that comes from being in the presence of the rhythms of nature.





AN AMBUSH AMONG THE CHERRIES!

Before the little group headed toward the **park**, Holger said good-bye, but he promised his new **friends** that he would visit them at **YOSHIMUNE ACADEMY**.

When the **THEA SISTERS**, Kumi, and her father arrived at the festival, the mouselings found a breathtaking spectacle: Hundreds of rice paper **lamps** shone among the blooming cherry and plum trees. White petals and others as pink as powder puffs drifted through the air like snowflakes. Out among the cherry blossoms, the world seemed a truly **magical** place.

"It's like being inside a cherry blossom snow globe!" Paulina said breathily.





Colette nodded. "Isn't it amazing? I don't think I've ever seen any place so *beautiful*."

The air was warm, and the sweet smell of flowers surrounded the mouselings and Mr. Nakamura as they walked along a carpet of the soft fallen *petals*. The whole park was immersed in a dreamlike atmosphere. The paper lanterns spread their *glow* through the blossoms, sending *GLIMMERS* of light into the peaceful night.

Adding to the evening's perfection was that the tension between Kumi and her father seemed to be *disappearing*, slowly but surely.

"What a lovely evening!" sighed Violet.

"We've discovered so many *WONDERS* over these last few days, but this place is the best of all!" Paulina echoed.

Suddenly, Pam frowned. "Well, we'd better







enjoy it while it lasts, because tomorrow we have to leave **TOKYO** and return to the academy."

"But surely **KUMI** and her father will see each other in **August** for the **yosakoi festival!**" Nicky pointed out.

Suddenly, the atmosphere completely changed. Kumi stopped *smiling* and shot her father an apprehensive look.

Mr. Nakamura stopped walking, and a **severe** expression returned to his face. "I will not be at that celebration."

"But it's a very important event for your **daughter!**" protested Paulina.



Nicky nodded. "Yes, **KUMI** is organizing an amazing **dance** **this** **year** for the academy: You simply cannot miss it!"

Kumi **sadly** shook her snout and whispered, "It's true, *Otosan**, it would make me so **HAPPY** if you would come! You could see with your own eyes that there's nothing wrong with updating traditions —"

Mr. Nakamura cut her short. "**Nonsense**, Kumi! I will never watch the **Yosakoi festival**; Get that into your head!"

The **THEA SISTERS** exchanged **FEARFUL** glances. And to think that just a few minutes earlier, father and daughter had been getting along so well!

It seemed like things couldn't get any worse. Then, suddenly, three **suspicious** rodents in dark clothes and masks appeared

* *Otosan* means father in Japanese.

CLUE!



in front of the little group! A moment later, three more scoundrels leaped from the branches of a **TREE** and **SURROUNDED** them. They closed in on Mr. Nakamura.

"Heelllllp!!!" shouted Kumi. There were many other rodents wandering the park's



paths — surely someone would be able to help them!

But it was **useless**: In an instant, the six masked strangers had grabbed her father, **GAGGED** him, and scurried away with him! They were so quick that the mouselets were left standing there, **PETRIFIED**.

Kumi's father had just been *ratnapped*!



Six masked rodents took Kumi's father! Who could they be, and what do they want with him?



A DIFFICULT moment

Kumi and the **THEA SISTERS** **rushed** after the **RATNAPPERS**, but they had already disappeared without a **TRACE**.

Grief-stricken and worried, the mouselets returned to the Nakamura house. **KUMI** was in **SHOCK**, and **Colette, Nicky, PAMELA, PAULINA**, and **Violet** had no intention of leaving her alone. They would do everything they could to help her!

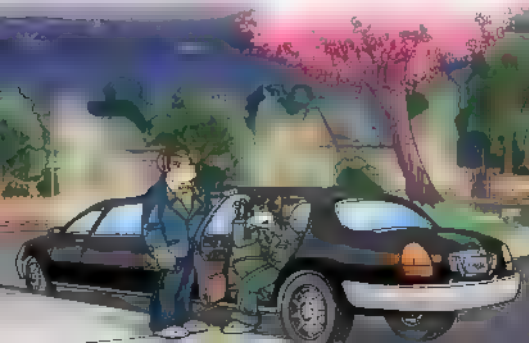
The first thing they did was call Holger, who arrived in a flash. He was able to answer many of the amateur **detectives'** questions about who might want to harm Mr. Nakamura.

"My father doesn't have **enemies!**" Kumi kept repeating. The mouselings could tell she

could hardly believe what had happened.
“He is an esteemed **artist** who is respected
by everyone. Who could have done such a
thing?!”

The **mouselets** could only shake their
snouts in sympathy and try to comfort her.

Less than an hour after the **RATNAPPING**,
a black **ifmouseine** stopped in front of
the Nakamura house. Pam and Paulina
exchanged glances.



"Well, would you believe that?" Pam murmured.

"It's Mr. Ishikuro," said Paulina.

The ~~WEALTHY~~ arts patron emerged from his luxurious car and entered the house. He seemed **agitated**. "I was on my way to apologize to my dear friend for my strong words earlier when I heard the **incredible** news. I can't **believe** it! Are there any suspects?"

Nicky **BLANDED** at Kumi's sad snout and declared, "Not yet, no. But we're working on it!"

Mr. Ishikuro looked **ASTONISHED**. But the mouselings were unfazed.

"That's right! **CONFUSING** cases like this one are just our cup of cheese," said Pam.

The color momentarily returned to Kumi's snout, and she smiled faintly. Colette gave her



a **big** hug while Paulina reassured her. "I have **courage**, Kumi! We'll stick by you until we've **found** your father!"

For a moment, hope **lit** the room's dark atmosphere.

But Violet noticed that **someone** didn't seem too **happy**. "Is there something wrong, Mr. Ishikuro?"

The businessman **flinched** and then quickly replied. "Uh, no, no, of course not! I

just thought that it would be better if **KUMI** went back to Kyoto with you, instead of having to stay in Tokyo waiting to hear from the **RATNAPPERS**. At a time like this, she should be with her friends."

CLUE!



Kumi shook her snout decidedly, "Oh no! I can't **LEAVE** now. I have to wait for news of my father."

"But, my dear, there's absolutely **nothing** you can do here!" Mr. Ishikuro said with



conviction. “Go back to Kyoto and pull yourself **together**. I will worry about everything on **this end!**”

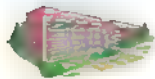
The **THEA SISTERS** didn't like his tone at all: It seemed like **Mr. Ishikuro** was trying to get **RID** of them! But why?

At **that point**, Holger **came forward**. The young rodent put a paw around Kumi's shoulder and whispered **sweetly**, “Mr. Ishikuro is **RIGHT**, Kumi! It won't do you any good to **stay here** and wait by the phone. I will stay here and call you with every bit of **news**. I promise!”

Holger was like family to Kumi, so she let herself be convinced. Together, she and the **THEA SISTERS** returned to the hotel to prepare for their **sad** journey back to Kyoto.



Why did Mr. Ishikuro insist that the mouselets leave the Nakamura house? Hmmm . . .



A TRUSTY ASSISTANT

Over the next few days, it was very **hard** for Kumi to return to her regular life at the academy. She felt really **down**, waiting to hear news about her father, **and** she wasn't able to concentrate, not even at the Art and Dance Club meetings.

Sakura immediately noticed that her friend had **CHANGED** after the trip to **TOKYO**, but didn't know why. **KUMI** had decided she didn't want anyone else **at school** involved in the **UGLY** situation, so she didn't tell Sakura what **had** happened.

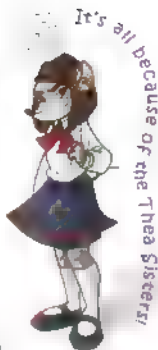
But because Kumi was so distant and distracted, Sakura thought that Kumi didn't want to be her **friend** anymore. And

Sakura was sure that it was all because of the THEA SISTERS!

Meanwhile, Colette, Holly, PAMELA, PAVUNA, and Violet were doing all they could to comfort their friend. One day, as they were working on the costumes for the Yosakoi, Colette saw that KUMI had placed her NEEDLE on the table and was gazing sadly out the window.

To lift her spirits, Colette took her friend's paw and said, "You'll see. Kumi: Everything will be all right. Holger seems like a trustworthy rodent."

Kumi's eyes softened. "He is! For many years he has been my father's best assistant,



and he's like a member of my **FAMILY**."

"He seems really **PASSIONATE** about Bunraku," observed Paulina.

Kumi nodded. "He has dedicated his life to learning Bunraku! He came to **JAPAN**



from Sweden when he was only eighteen years old so he could **learn** from my father, and since then, he has **never LEFT**." She paused and then added, "**Holger** would be the perfect successor to my father, but our family tradition says that the *omazukui* must be **JAPANESE**."

"What a shame!" **SIGHED** Violet.

"Yes, my father is **very** stubborn about tradition—" **KUMI** stopped herself. She was silent for a **while**, thinking of her **imprisoned** father.

"Don't you worry, Kumi," Pam declared. "We're going to get your father back. I just know it!"

Nicky nodded. "You can **COUNT** on us!"



MR. ISHIKURO'S PLAN

The next morning, Kumi had a visitor: **Holger** had arrived from **TOKYO**. Kumi and the **THEA SISTERS** immediately gathered at the Art and **Dance Club** room, which was completely **deserted** at that hour.

Holger began telling the mouselets the news. "We've received a message from the **RATNAPPERS**: They are asking for a mountain of *yen*⁴ as ransom. They want more than even Mr. Ishikuro can gather in time for their deadline!"

Kumi was **worried**. "Kumi, I don't want you to get your tail in a *twist* over this," Holger said. "Mr. Ishikuro has already come up with a plan to **FREE** your father and

⁴ The *yen* is Japan's national currency.

turn the **RATNAPPERS** over to the police!"

"We will help, too!" declared Nicky, who was always ready for **action**, especially when it meant helping a friend.

"Thanks, but that won't be necessary," responded Holger with a smile. "The plan requires just one rodent: **KUMI!**"

Kumi's snout was tense and **PALE**, but her squeak was firm and filled with resolve:



"I will do whatever is **necessary**. I owe it to my father."

"There is just one thing left to do," Holger announced. "We must get the **princess**!"

Mr. Ishikuro's plan was **simple**: Instead of paying the ratnappers **MONEY**, they would give them the precious marionette.

"The princess must be worth a fortune!" cried Colette in surprise.

MR. ISHIKURO'S PLAN

"It's **priceless**, but we don't have any other choice if we're going to set a **trap** for those rotten rodents!"



WE WILL GIVE THE
RATNAPPERS THE PRINCESS
INSTEAD OF THE MONEY.

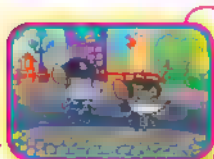


HOLGER WILL WAIT FOR THE
RATNAPPERS AND EXCHANGE THE
PRINCESS FOR MR. NAKAMURA!

Holger explained. "Once the meeting point is established, I'll wait for the **RATNAPPERS** and **EXCHANGE** the marionette for Mr. Nakamura. At the moment we make the trade, Mr. Ishikuro will arrive with the **POLICE!**"

KUMI thought it over for a minute and then agreed. "I **TRUST** you, Holger, and I will go get the *princess*, but there's just one condition: I will take her to the **RATNAPPERS** myself. I know my father would want it to be that way. Besides, I can't stand waiting around any longer!"

"**Right on, Kumi!**" said Pam. "We're not



AS SOON AS WE MAKE THE EXCHANGE, MR. ISHIKURO WILL ARRIVE WITH THE POLICE.



THE RATNAPPERS WILL BE ARRESTED. AND KUMI'S FATHER WILL BE FREE!

about to stay here **twiddling** our paws! It's time for action!"

"Uh-huh!" Paulina said **emphatically**. "We promised we would help you, and that's what we'll do!" The rest of the mouselets nodded in agreement.

Kumi's eyes grew misty with **emotion**. She squeezed her friends' paws tightly. "I don't know how to thank you, mouselings! You will be my warriors, just like **Momotarō!**"

"**HA HA HA**, it's true! We really need a dog, a monkey, and a pheasant!" agreed Holger, **BURSTING** with laughter so contagious that even Kumi had to smile.

The **THEA SISTERS** looked at one another in confusion.

"Dogs and monkeys?" said Violet. "What are you rodents **squeaking** about?!"



THE FABLE OF MOMOTARO

Holger and Kumi **GIGGLED**.

"It's an old **children's** story," Holger explained. "All the **JAPANESE** mouselings know it, right, Kumi?"

"When I was young, I always wanted someone to read it to me," agreed Kumi, *smiling*. "If my father was busy, I would bring my **book** to Holger, and he could never say no! **You see**, the fable of Momotaro is about how you can overcome any problem with a little help from your friends.

JUST LISTEN...

THE FABLE OF MOMOTARO



One day, the old woman went to the river to wash her clothes. There she saw a giant peach floating on the water. She decided to give it to her husband as a gift.



When the old couple split open the peach, they were shocked: inside was a beautiful baby boy!



The husband and the wife immediately decided they would raise the boy as their son.



They named him Momotaro, which means "first son of the peach." The boy grew up into a strong and intelligent young rodent.



One day, Momotaro decided to prove his worth. He left to challenge the terrible monsters on the legendary island of Onigashima.



On his journey, Momotaro met a dog, a monkey, and a pheasant. He was so generous to the three animals that they decided to help him on his mission.



Thanks to his courage and the help of his friends, Momotaro defeated the terrible inhabitants of the island and took their treasure.



The four friends returned to Momotaro's village, where the old couple greeted them joyfully.

Hearing Momotaro's story, the village people elected him leader of the town. For many long years, he led with wisdom with the friends who had stood by his side.

As soon as **KUMI** finished her tale, Pam gave a deep bow. "Let me have the honor of being your warrior monkey, Kumi!" she **joked**.

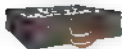
"Oh no, not a chance! I want to be your **primary primate!**" declared Nicky.

Violet gave a **tinkling** laugh. "Okay, in that case, I will be the **pleasant pheasant!**"

Paulina and Colette looked at each other. "Guess that makes us the **POWERFUL** dog!" said Paulina.

Colette shrugged. "Well, if I have to be a dog, I'm going to do it with **style!**"

Momotaro's company was **complete!**



THE PRINCESS'S HIDEAWAY

The next morning, the **THEA SISTERS** woke up early. They were going to accompany Kumi to the precious princess's **HIDING PLACE**.

As they were leaving the academy, they were so busy **chattering** that they didn't notice someone watching them.



It was **Sakura**. When she saw the group *scampering* along together, her jealousy surged. She was still in the dark about Mr. Nakamura's **RATNAPPING**, so she was clueless about Kumi's situation. But she was determined to get her friend back. So she decided to take action!

Meanwhile, *Colette*, *Nicky*, **PAMELA**, **PAULINA**, **Violet**, and **KUMI** were headed to the outskirts of the city. After half an hour or so, they reached a **DIRT PATH** surrounded by farms.

Kumi stopped in front of the entrance to an **old** Japanese house surrounded by lovely **cherry blossom** trees. "A poet built this house a long time ago. Welcome to Rakushisha!"

The **THEA SISTERS** looked around, taking everything in: the **SIMPLE** straw roof, the



Rakushisha is a famous traditional Japanese house. It is very simple and made of natural materials. Originally, it belonged to the poet **Mukai Kyorai**. The house's name means "the house of the fallen persimmons." According to legend, the poet woke one morning and found that the persimmons he'd grown had fallen overnight during a storm.

The house has clay walls and a straw roof. Short poems called **haiku** are inscribed on stones in its garden, and the walls are adorned with poems written in ink in Japanese characters.

ancient wood, the smooth stones, and the poetry written on the clay walls. It was one of the calmest, most peaceful places they'd ever seen!

There was no doubt: This was the perfect hideaway for a princess!

The house's guardian knew Kumi well. He had been a friend of her father's since they were in SCHOOL, and Mr. Nakamura had trusted him with his most valuable possession.

When KUMI told him what had happened to her father, the guardian immediately gave her a precious EBONY case.

At that moment, Kumi's cell phone rang. It was Holger!

The mouselets scurried back to the academy at once.



AN IMPORTANT APPOINTMENT

The meeting with the **RATNAPPERS** was set for eight that evening. It would be held not in Tokyo, but near the academy in Kyoto. So the **THEA SISTERS** and Holger agreed to gather in the **Art and Dance Club** room before the meeting to figure out the details of their **PLAN**.

Meanwhile, **KUMI** returned to her room to prepare. She was just about to leave when she heard someone squeak, "**Hi, Kumi!**"

Kumi was **so** tense she almost **JUMPED**



out of her fur. But she relaxed when she saw **Sakura** standing in the doorway to her room.

"Alone at last!" her old friend said. "What happened to your new friends? They sure **STICK** close to you!"

For a moment, Kumi was tempted to fill her in on everything that was happening. But after one glance at her watch, she changed her **mind**. She didn't have time!

"I'm sorry, **Sakura**, I need to go now," Kumi said. "I will explain everything to you later, when things have **calmed down** again!"

"Oh, there's nothing to explain!" Sakura said sulkily. "If you prefer the company of those **mice**, then go find them! I certainly won't be the one to **stop you**!"

Kumi was **STUNNED**. "What? What are you talking about?! I don't prefer them to you! It's just that —"

At that moment, the **bells** of the academy clock tower interrupted her, sounding the time with their deep chimes: It was **SEVEN-THIRTY!**

She turned to her bed and picked up the case with the **precious** marionette. While Kumi's tail was turned, Sakura reached over and grabbed Kumi's cell phone, then **hid it** in her uniform pocket.

KUMI was in such a hurry that she didn't



notice anything. "Sakura, please try to understand. I am **terribly** late for something very important! We'll squeak about this later . . . I promise!"

Sakura watched her friend **RUSH OFF**. She was feeling very hurt. "Oh, you think you're late for a date with your precious **THEA SISTERS**, Kumi," she muttered. "But what will you do when they don't **SHOW UP**? And they won't even be able to warn you. . . . You'll have to sit waiting for them **FOR HOURS**! What will you think of your **dear** new friends then?"

Sakura had a trick or two up her **tail**! She hurried off to put her **plan** into action.





TRAPPED LIKE RATS IN A CAGE!

Meanwhile, the **THEA SISTERS** and **Holger** reviewed the **PLAN** for the zillionth time. Everything was **figured** out down to the very last whisker.

"We will follow Kumi from **afar** so the ratnappers don't notice us," said Violet.

"Then we'll wait for the **RATNAPPERS** to bring Mr. Nakamura for the exchange," said Paulina.

"And we'll catch them by **SURPRISE** and keep them there until the **POLICE** come!" finished Colette triumphantly.

Holger was **JUMPIER** than a mouse who'd accidentally wandered into a cat shelter. "Be careful! We just need to make

sure the **BATNAPPERS** don't get away. . . .
Don't take too many **risks!**"

"Don't worry, **Holger!**" Pam said, reassuring him. "We know how to handle slimy sewer rats like these!"

At that moment, they heard the academy clock **STRIKE**. Nicky called them all to order. "Let's **shake a tail**, mouselings! Kumi is probably already on her way."

The five mouselets and Holger headed for the door, but it was **LOCKED!**

They pulled, they **pushed**, they **banged**, and they squeaked as **loudly** as they could, but nothing worked. **Someone** had locked them in! But who?!

On the other side of the door, **Sakura** **smiled** in satisfaction. She was completely **unaware** of the **TERRIBLE** trouble her trick would cause!

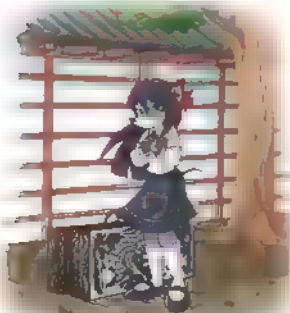


KUMI, meanwhile, had arrived at the meeting spot: the beautiful **garden** around the Imperial Palace of Kyoto. The night was silent, and the **moonlight** illuminated the cherry trees, whose **petals** sparkled like crystals.

Kumi was tense and worried: She didn't see the **THEA SISTERS** anywhere, and the **RATNAPPERS** were about to arrive!

Apprehensively, she began searching her pockets for her **CELL PHONE**, but it was missing! She must have left it in her room. *Succulent sushi with 5 UJIS on top!* Kumi thought. *How could I have been so careless?*

More important, how could the **THEA SISTERS** and **Holger** have abandoned her at such a **desperate** moment?!





WAY TO GO, COLETTE!

Back in the Art and Dance Club room, **Holger** and the **mouselings** were desperately dialing Kumi's **CELL PHONE**.

"She's not answering!" **PAULINA** said **anxiously**.

Holger shook his snout in dismay. "And neither is Mr. Ishikuro! I can't reach him. He should have been here by now, ready to have the police intervene, but he seems to have **disappeared!**"

"**OH GOOD GOUDA**, we can't just stay locked in here at such a time!" Pam burst out.

"Just leave everything to me, mouselings!" **Holger** said suddenly. "I'll handle it! I'll

CLUE!



Why isn't Mr. Ishikuro answering his phone?

knock down the door with my secret **power punches!**"

The **THEA SISTERS** looked at one another in surprise. At this point, they were willing to try anything to **escape** from that room!

Holger twisted himself up like a **pretzel**. He fixed his eyes on the door and then balanced on one **toe**.



Pam and Nicky could barely stifle their giggles.

Paulina nudged them. "Shhh!" she whispered. "Maybe he knows karate!"



Meanwhile, Colette was busy rummaging through her favorite pink purse. "Ouh! Here it is!" she declared at last. "Forget your power punches, Holger! We can open the door with *this*!"

Colette pulled out a pink hairpin.

Her friends stared at her in disbelief. Colette inserted the hairpin into the lock, just like rodents do in action movies. After a few minutes, the pin clicked a mechanism in the door, and the door swung open!

"Way to go, Colette!" cheered Nicky, throwing her paws around her friend.

"Come on, let's move our paws!" cried Pam.



WHAT A BETRAYAL!

Meanwhile, Kumi was waiting at the meeting place. **Shivering** in the chilly evening breeze, she glanced around nervously, looking for the **RATNAPPERS**. While she stood alone in the dark, even the **SHADOWS** of the cherry blossoms made her whiskers quiver.

Suddenly, she heard quick **PRIDESTEPS** approaching. . . .

TAP! TA-TAP!

TAP! TA-TAP!

Kumi trembled from her snout to her tail. Then she saw that it was the **THEA SISTERS** and **Holger**!

The five mouselets were out of **BREATH** from their run, but they hugged their friend in relief.

"Phew!" We . . . were . . . afraid . . . we

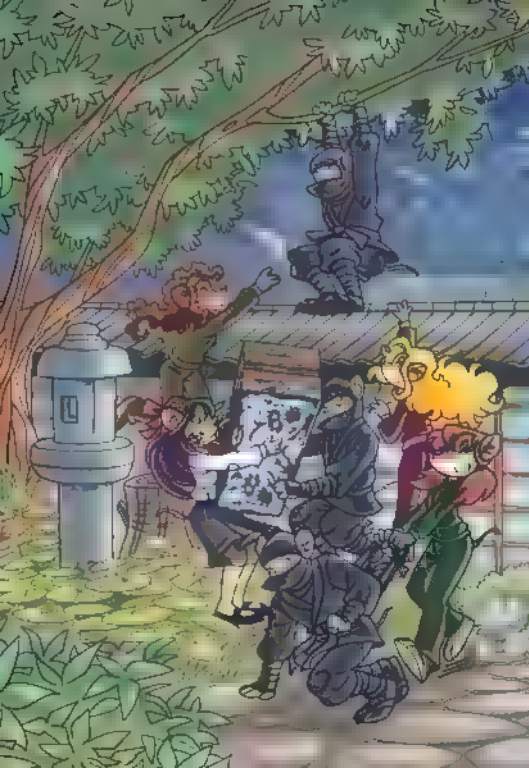


wouldn't . . . make it in time!" gasped Paulina.

"Running a . . . rat race . . . wasn't exactly part of our plan," huffed Colette.

"Someone tried to stop us!" explained Holger, who was also out of **BREATH**.

Their relief lasted only a moment, however, because the six **RATNAPPERS** suddenly emerged from the **SHADOWS**. But there was no sign of Mr. Nakamura!





Where have we seen the mouse
Holger is unmasking?

"WHAT A BETRAYAL!" yelled Holger in alarm. "This isn't an exchange — it's a **trap!**"

"These **crooks** just want to steal the **princess!**" added Nicky as she grabbed one by the belt.

CLUE!



The **mouselings** did their best to protect Kumi and the princess, but the masked mice were well trained.

The **THEA SISTERS'** only hope was the arrival of the police Mr. Ishikuro had promised, but they never **appeared**.

"Gotcha!" yelled Holger suddenly. He'd grasped one of the criminals by the mask and revealed his **UGLY** snout.

But at that moment, another masked mouse managed to pull the case out of Kumi's paws.



Mr. Ishikuro promised he would show up with the police — but where are they?

"Noooo!" They've got the princess!"
cried Kumi, **TERRIFIED**.

By then, it was too late. Just as quickly and silently as they had arrived, the six **masked mice** slunk away into the **night** with the precious marionette, leaving behind only the dark mask **Holger** clutched **sadly** in his paws.





FRIENDS LIKE BEFORE!

The situation seemed truly hopeless.

"I can't believe it!" cried Paulina in **distress**.
"They made off with the **princess!**"

"And my father is still missing!" said Kumi,
SHAKING her snout. "What can we do?"

The answer came in a soft squeak behind them. "You can ask all the rodents who love you to help you deal with this **CHALLENGE.**"

The mouselets and Holger turned around.
It was **Sakura!**

After she'd left the **THEA SISTERS** and **Holger** **looked** in the Art and Dance Club room, Sakura had begun looking for Kumi. She'd caught sight of her friend leaving the academy grounds and had followed her.

"Kumi, I'm so sorry—I've been really **selfish!**" confessed **Sakura**. "Instead of listening to you, I only thought of myself!" She turned to **Colette**, **Tiffany**, **PAMELA**, **PAULETTE**, and **Violet**. "I was the one who locked you in the club room. Ever since you arrived at the academy, I've been **JEALOUS** of your friendship with **KUMI**, but that's no excuse for the way I treated you."



KUMI forgave her friend immediately. "I was wrong, too, Kumi. I made a **serious** mistake by not telling you the truth! I only wanted to protect you, but I should've trusted you and told you what was really going on."

Full of **emotion**, Sakura hugged her friend tight. Then she turned toward the **THEA SISTERS**. "Can you mouselings ever forgive me?"

"Of course we can, **SISTER!**" Pam answered for the group. "We got off on the wrong **paw**, but that's no reason we can't make up for **lost** time. Let's be friends."

The mouselings all

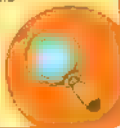


shook paws, **happy** ■ have made a new friend.

In the meantime, **Holger** was preoccupied with the mask he was holding. "But of course! That's who it was!" he exclaimed suddenly, **hitting** his paw against his snout. "We can still save your father, **KUMI!** I know who **RATNAPPED** him and stole the **princess!**"

LET'S EVALUATE THE SITUATION

- 1) Mr. Ishikuro wanted to buy Mr. Nakamura's precious marionette, but Kumi's father refused to give it up.
- 2) When Mr. Nakamura was ratnapped, Mr. Ishikuro seemed anxious to get the Thea Sisters off the case.
- 3) It was Mr. Ishikuro's idea to trap the ratnappers. But he never showed up to follow through, and neither did the police!
- 4) Where have we seen the rat whose mask Holger ripped off?





A PLAN OF ATTACK

"It's all becoming clear!" declared **Holger**. "The **ransom** . . . that's why the meeting with the **RATNAPPERS** was set for Kyoto. Mr. Ishikuro lives near here, and he must have known the princess's **HIDING PLACE** was in the area."

He waved the scoundrel's mask. "The proof is in the **cheese pudding**! I knew I'd **seen** that rodent's snout before somewhere, and I just remembered where. One of the **RATNAPPERS** is Mr. Ishikuro's driver!"

"**NO!** I don't believe it!" Kumi was very upset. "I've never liked Mr. Ishikuro, but he's always been a **LOYAL** friend to my father."

"But Holger's theory makes sense!" Paulina interjected. "When we met him, Mr. Ishikuro



THE UNMASKED
RATNAPPER IS
MR. ISHIKURO'S
DRIVER!



was trying to convince your father to **SELL** the *princess*."

"Uh-huh!" Violet agreed. "And after the **RATNAPPING**, he was awfully quick to get us out of Tokyo. In fact, he was a little **too** quick!"

"Not ■ mention his great plan to intercept

the **RATNAPPERS**," concluded Nicky, folding her paws across her chest. "Where was he when we needed him?"

The **EVIDENCE** all seemed to point to Mr. Ishikuro.

"It's awful!" **protested** Colette. "Mr. Ishikuro got away with it, and Kumi's father is still **MISSING**!"

"Oh, we're not done with that rat burglar yet!" Pam declared. She was more **DETERMINED** than ever.

The little group returned to the academy to brainstorm a new plan. They gathered in the Art and Dance Club room.

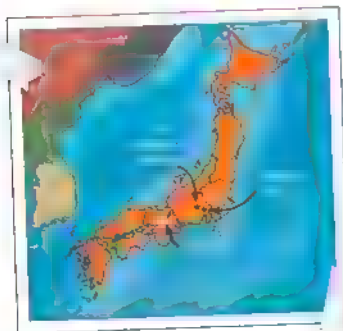
On the walk back, **KUMI** had been thinking about where her father and the princess would be kept. "Listen, mouselets, I know Mr. Ishikuro's house well. It's a few hours outside of **KYOTO**, near Mount Fuji.

That's where he keeps all his **treasures**. If my father and the **princess** aren't there, then I'll be a gerbil's **grandmother!**"

"We must go there **IMMEDIATELY**," said Violet decisively.

The mouselings said good-bye to Sakura, who agreed to remain at the academy to explain their absence to the professors.

KUMI and the **THEA SISTERS** headed to



the Kyoto **train station** to meet **Holger**.

As before, the view of Mount Fuji was breathtaking. The slopes were still covered with a bit of **snow**, and the peak was surrounded by **low-hanging** clouds.

"Let's hope Mount Fuji is sending us some good **LUCK!**" Nicky said.

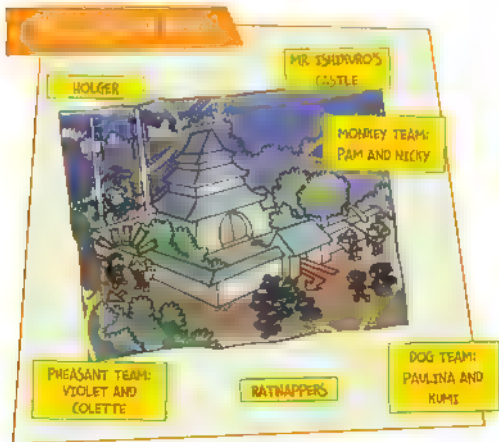
By the **time** the mice arrived at their destination, it was dawn. As the sun's glow lit up the mountainside, the seven friends arrived at the home of Mr. Ishikuro. It was a three-story building that resembled a feudal Japanese castle. It was slender and surrounded by tall, rough **STONE** walls decorated with **inlaid** colored wood. The sloped roof tiles reflected the **bright** light of the sun.

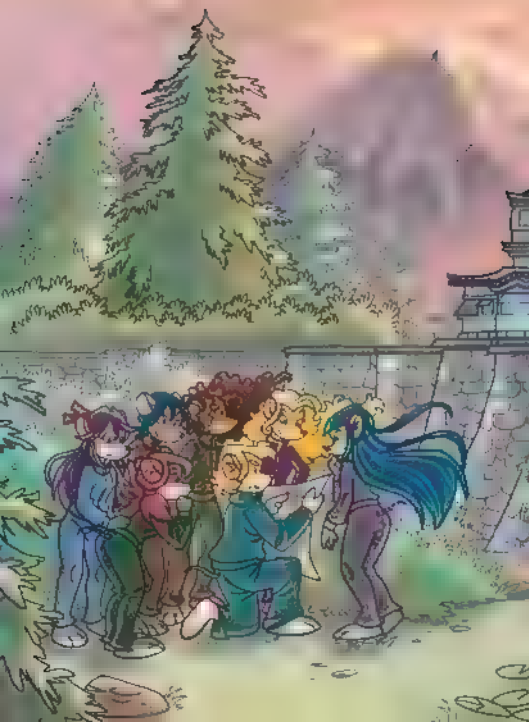
"**Moldy Brie** on a baguette, that's some fortress!" commented Colette.

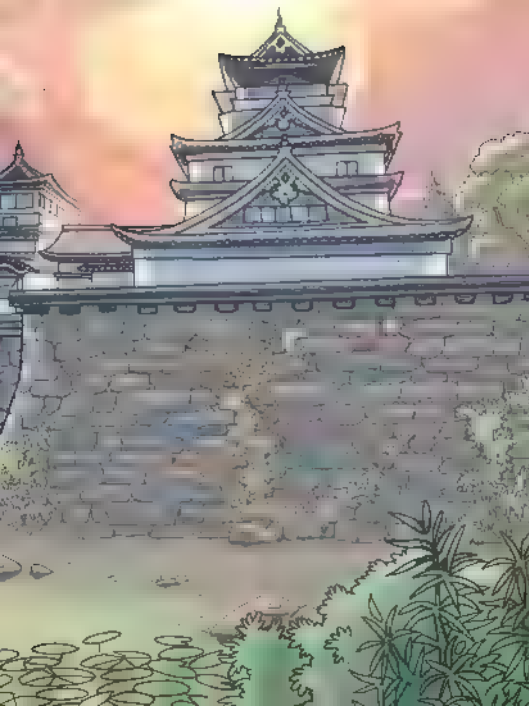
"Getting in there will be no **joke**."

observed Paulina. "But have no fear, mouselings. I have a **PLAN!**"

Paulina took a sheet of paper out of her pocket and drew a map of the **CASTLE**. "I did a little research on my **MousePhone** on







the train ride. The castle has a state-of-the-rat **ALARM** system.”

Holger took the map and looked at it carefully. Then, to **lighten** the mood, he said, “Fortunately, we have **some** legendary heroes to help us — the *warrior monkey*, *pheasant*, and *dog*, just as in the story of **Momofaro!**”

The seven rodents huddled together to work out a **detailed** plan of action. Each had a critical task to **achieve** for the plan to **work**.

The mice got into position.

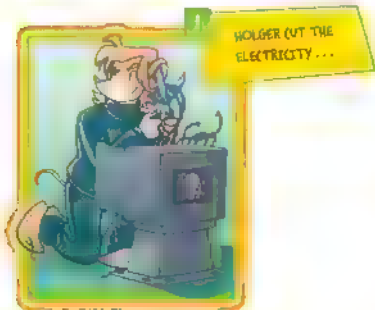
**The moment had arrived to
settle the score!**



CODE NAME: MOMOTARO

Holger was the first to swing into action. He snuck to the castle's power box and cut the **electricity**, disabling the alarm system for a few minutes.

As soon as the castle was completely **DARK**, the guards ran out. The guards



were the six **RATNAPPERS** who had taken Mr. Nakamura!

At that point, the **pheasant** team came on the scene. Violet and Colette scurried over to a wall far from the entrance and got the attention of the **guards** by **yelling** and making faces at them.

The reaction was immediate. As a group, the six mice scampered toward the two



mouselings, who quickly **HID** between the trees before the ratnappers could catch up.

Now it was the monkey team's turn!

Nicky and Pam, the most **ATHLETIC** of the group, threw two heavy **ropes** over the **STONE** wall surrounding the castle. During the general confusion, they scaled the wall and leaped **lightly** to the ground. And just in time, too: The guards had activated the





SO PAULINA AND KUMI
WERE ABLE TO GET IN
AND FIND THE CASTLE'S
SECURITY CENTER!

castle's **EMERGENCY** generator, and the **lights** had come back on.

Pam and Nicky were **easily** able to open the door and let in the dog team: Paulina and Kumi. The last two mouselings had the most **CHALLENGING** task: finding the castle's security center and trapping the **GUARDS** inside their own **DUNGEON**!

"This way!" Paulina hissed. "Let's look behind that door."

Nervously, **KUMI** swung the door open. Before them lay a **room** filled with **COMPUTERS** and **video monitors**. "This is it!"



BEHIND BARS!

Meanwhile, Violet, Colette, and Holger had managed to sneak onto the grounds. Now the chase was inside the castle **walls**! The three rodents did what they could to keep the guards busy playing hide-and-seek through the **winding** corridors and **OVERSIZE** rooms.

Paulina and Kumi were studying the computerized **ALARM** system. After a few moments, Paulina found a solution. She immediately called Nicky's cell phone. "**Run** to the hallway that leads to the stables, and make sure the **guards** follow you!"

Nicky was the **fastest** of the group. She sped down a long, **D A R K** hallway, making sure the guards came after her. As they drew closer to Nicky, heavy steel **bars** fell from above.

KERPLINK! KERPLANK! KERPLONK!

The guards were **TRAPPED** like rats in a cage!

Paulina had been monitoring Nicky's **MOVEMENTS** on the security system's **COMPUTER SCREENS**. As soon as she'd seen that her friend was safe at the



end of the hallway, she'd blocked off the exit.

What a surprise for the six **CRIMINALS** to find themselves behind bars!

KUMI and **THE OTHERS** slapped paws.
“**YEAAAAHHHHH!!!**”

But where was Mr. Ishikuro?





OFF WITH YOUR MASK!

The mouselets and Holger *quickly* regrouped and began to search the castle, which contained treasures from every century and every country.

"Look at all the *artwork!*" exclaimed Violet. "All this beauty deserves to be in a



museum, where other rodents can see it, not buried here in this **cold** castle!"

"This room is dedicated entirely to **JAPANESE** art," Holger noticed.

The room was filled with amazing **TREASURES** and precious ceramics lined up in a glass case next to two splendid **ancient** kimonos.

Nicky was examining a series of mannequins depicting characters from the



Noh* theater when she **JUMPED**. "Wait just a minute!" she exclaimed. "*This* isn't a mannequin!"

"**Father!**" cried Kumi. She scurried over to free her father, who was *tied up* and gagged in the middle of all the ancient mannequins.

Mr. Nakamura **SQUEEZED** his daughter tight. "Oh, little Kumi, you *came* all the way here to save me!" Then he hugged Holger, too, and saved a deep bow for the **THEA SISTERS**. "You have really been quite **COURAGEOUS** mouselings. I don't know how to thank you!"

"We need to **hurry!**" warned Paulina. "The alarm system has called the **POLICE**, and we still need to find the *princess* before Ishikuro discovers us!"

* One of the classic forms of Japanese theater.

"Too late, you little **GREASE BALLS!**" interrupted someone behind them. It was Mr. Ishikuro, and he was holding the case with the *princess!*

That **rat** had hid in his treasure room at the first sign of **danger**, but now he was **TRAPPED!** Between him and the door were Holger, Mr. Nakamura, and the six young warrior mouselings!



Mr. Nakamura advanced on him threateningly. "How could you do this to me?!" he asked. "I thought you were my friend!"

Mr. Ishikuro glanced nervously at the door. But the **MOUSELINGS** and **Holger** stood in his way.



"You don't understand!" he snapped in irritation. "I *had* to have this marionette! It belongs here, with my **treasures!**"

Holger shot him a nasty look. "A Bunraku marionette needs to come to life with the **emotions** that only true artists with skill and **heart** can share with the public!" he said passionately. "It isn't right to lock her up in a room where no one can **SEE HER.**"

Mr. Nakamura looked fondly at his faithful **apprentice**. Understanding and admiration **shone** in his eyes. At last he had realized that his ancient Bunraku tradition would be safer in Holger's paws than in anyone else's.

The **Nakamura School** had just found a worthy successor!

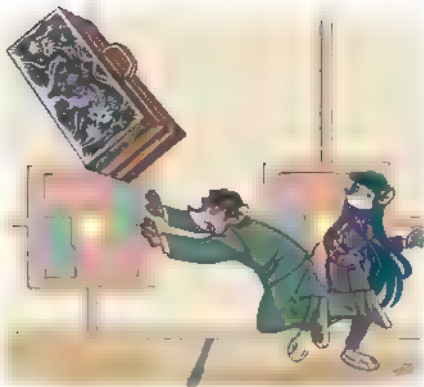


IN PAWCUFFS!

But Mr. Ishikuro had no intention of giving up. He **shot** another sneaky glance toward the door.

"You little mice have **RUINED** everything!" he hissed, scowling at the **THEA SISTERS**. With those words, he scampered toward the door in an attempt to **ESCAPE**. *Colette*, *Nicky*, **PAMELA**, **PAULINA**, and **Violet** immediately **leaped** after him, and Violet managed to trip him. As Mr. Ishikuro fell to the floor, the case with the precious marionette slipped from his **paws**.

For a **LOOOOOOONG** instant, they all held their breath as the case **FLEW** over their heads.



"NOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!" cried Kumi.

The case opened in midair, and the princess tumbled toward the floor, where she was sure to break into a thousand **PIECES!**

Disaster seemed inevitable, but Pamela **MOVED** fast. Quicker than a cat cornering a mouse, she **POUNCED**, catching the princess right before she hit the ground!

"**YES!**" the mouselings cheered in unison.

Kumi's father tackled Mr. Ishikuro before he could escape.

Holger helped Pam **get up**. Then he carefully cradled the marionette in his paws. "The princess is safe!" he exclaimed.

Colette, **THEA**, **PAMELA**, **PAULINA**, **Violet**, and **KUMI** sighed in relief.

As for Mr. Ishikuro, he was **ANGRY**. He scowled at the **THEA SISTERS**. "I almost got away with it!"

"It's a good thing we were able to help stop you," Colette said.

Pam nodded. "There's only one place for **slimy sewer rats** like you!"

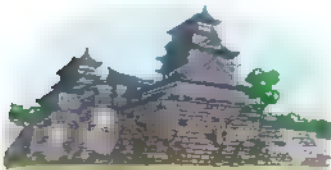
"In **PAWCUFFS!**" the mouselings cried.

At that moment, three police cars with blaring sirens pulled into the courtyard. The



police found the six furious guards already behind bars and a **VERY DISAPPOINTED** Mr. Ishikuro tied up and ready to be taken away!

Over the next few days, the police examined all the **artwork** in the castle. They discovered many **stolen** treasures that belonged to the **JAPANESE** people. The castle itself was seized by the authorities and would soon become a **BEAUTIFUL** museum open to lovers of Japanese **ART** and **TRADITION**.





THANK YOU, MOUSELINGS!

Now that they had saved her, the **THEA SISTERS** were finally able to admire the famous **princess** of the Bunraku theater.

"She's **beautiful**!" exclaimed Colette.

The princess's kimono sparkled with a thousand **golden** threads. It was covered with luminous **blossoms** that looked so real you could almost believe they'd just drifted from a **cherry tree**.

Holger looked at **KUMI**, and she nodded: The moment had arrived to return the princess to her rightful owner.

Holger **CROSSED** the room with a solemn expression. He **stopped** in front of his **teacher** and bowed deeply, holding the

marionette out to Mr. Nakamura. "It's time for the *princess* to come home, master!"

Mr. Nakamura shook his snout *gently* but firmly. "In your paws, she is *already* home, Holger. The princess is yours now!"

At first, *Holger* couldn't *BELIEVE* his ears. When he *understood* at last, *he* began thanking his teacher with a thousand deep **BOWS.**

KUMI was the first to congratulate the



new master of the Nakamura School.
"This is a **dream** come true, Holger! No one deserves **it** more than you do!"

"Speaking of a dream come true, it seems like a **mouseling** we know will soon be leaving for Paris!" whispered Nicky.

Hearing those words, Kumi **timidly** lifted her eyes toward her father. When she saw him **smile**, she raced into his paws. "Thank you, Father! **Thank you so much!**"

Mr. Nakamura shook his snout and patted his daughter's fur. "Don't thank me, thank your **precious** friends! They helped me realize that making you stay here would be like shutting up the princess in a **frozen** prison like Ishikuro's castle!"

Kumi spread her paws wide, as if to hug all five of her friends at once. "**THANK YOU, MOUSELINGS!**"



PARTY TIME!



you can't miss it!

As soon as they got back to Yoshimune Academy, my **dear** mouselings called me to fill me in on their fabumouse **adventure** under the cherry blossoms. They

told me so much about Kumi and Sakura that I started to feel as though I already knew them. Then they mentioned the **DANCE** they had been preparing for the annual yosakoi festival.

Colette was **SO EXCITED**. "You absolutely *can't* miss it, Thea!"

"We made a costume just for you, and we have sent it to **NEW MOUSE CITY** by **MousExpress!**" added Nicky.

"Yeah!" Paulina said. "Hurry up and buy your plane ticket. Mercury will get you the package just in time for your **departure!**"

"We're waiting for you, Thea!" they yelled as they hung up.

So now you understand what was in the package that came from Japan! It was a **splendid** traditional costume *Colette, Nicky, PAMELA, PAULINA, Violet*, and their **friends** had created for me to wear to the *yosakoi* festival!

When I arrived, the town of Kochi was bright with a thousand **COLORS**. The music of each group filled the air with *happiness*.

Kumi and Sakura took me in as an honored guest and helped me learn their choreography. Even **Holger**







danced with us, while Mr. Nakamura followed us from afar, **PROUD** of his daughter's talent.

So many **rodents**, **COLORS**, and **dances**!

It was really a **special** event for all of us. **JAPAN** would always have a place in our **hearts**!



The Sisters

**Be sure to check
out these exciting
Thea Sisters
adventures:**



**THEA STILTON
AND THE
DRAGON'S CODE**



**THEA STILTON
AND THE
MOUNTAIN OF FIRE**



**THEA STILTON
AND THE GHOST OF
THE SHIPWRECK**



**THEA STILTON
AND THE
SECRET CITY**



**THEA STILTON
AND THE MYSTERY
IN PARIS**



**THEA STILTON
AND THE CHERRY
BLOSSOM ADVENTURE**

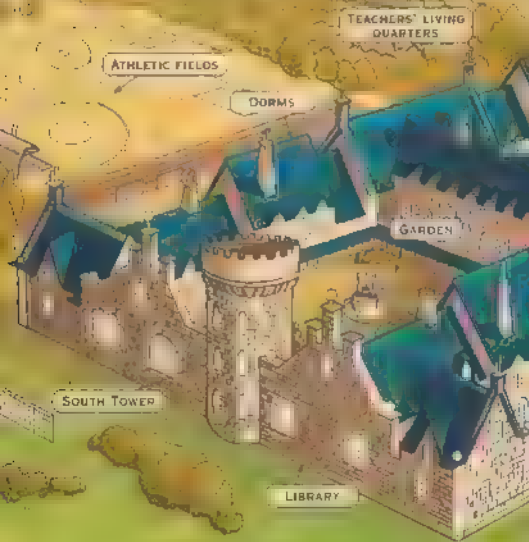


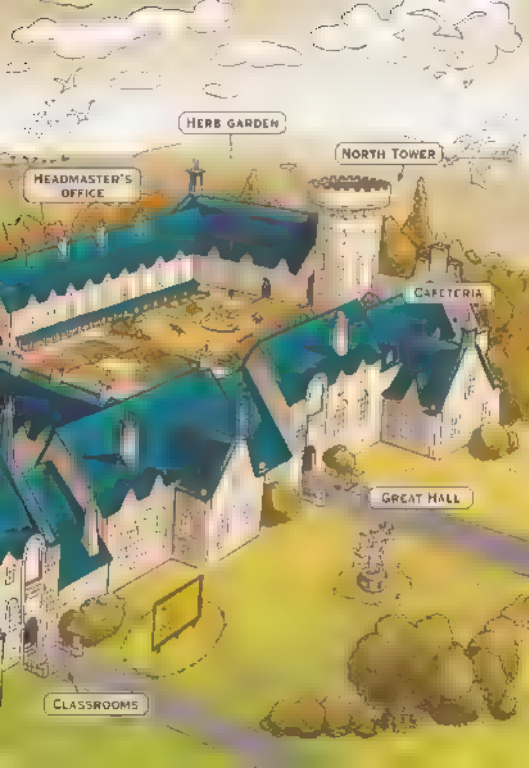
**THEA STILTON
AND THE
STAR CASTAWAYS**



**THEA STILTON:
BIG TROUBLE IN
THE BIG APPLE**

1 MOUSEFORD





HERB GARDEN

NORTH TOWER

HEADMASTER'S
OFFICE

CAFETERIA

GREAT HALL

CLASSROOMS



MAP OF WHALE ISLAND

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Falcon Peak | 14. Town Square |
| 2. Observatory | 15. Butterfly Bay |
| 3. Mount Landslide | 16. Mussel Point |
| 4. Solar Energy Plant | 17. Lighthouse Cliff |
| 5. Ram Plain | 18. Pelican Cliff |
| 6. Very Windy Point | 19. Nightingale Woods |
| 7. Turtle Bench | 20. Marine Biology Lab |
| 8. Beachy Beach | 21. Hawk Woods |
| 9. Mouseford Academy | 22. Windy Grotto |
| 10. Kneecap River | 23. Seal Grotto |
| 11. Mariner's Inn | 24. Seagulls Bay |
| 12. Port | 25. Seashell Beach |
| 13. Squid House | |



**Don't miss
any of
my other
fabumouse
adventures!**



**#1 Lost Treasure
of the Emerald Eye**



**#2 The Curse
of the Cheese
Pyramid**



**#3 Cat and
Mouse in a
Haunted House**



**#4 I'm Too Food
of My Feet!**



**#5 Four Miles
Deep in the Jungle**



**#6 Paws Off,
Choo-Panacci!**



**#7 Red Pizzas Pop
a Bake Louie!**



**#8 Attack of the
Bandid Cats**



**#9 A Fabumouse
Vacation for
Dummies**



**#10 All Wuzzee in
a Cup of Coffee**



#11 It's
Halloween, You
'Roided!



#12 Merry
Christmas,
Geronimo!



#13 The Phantom
of the Subway



#14 The Temple of
the Body of Fire



#15 The Mean
Mouse Coda



#16 A Cheese-
Colored Computer



#17 Watch Your
Whisker & Soften



#18 Shipwreck on
the Purple Islands



#19 My Name Is
Soften, Geronimo
Soften



#20 Surl's Up,
Geronimo!



#21 The Wild,
Wild West



#22 The Secret
of Castleter
Castle



A Christmas Tale



#23 Valentine's
Day Disaster



#24 Field Trip to
Niagara Falls



#25 The Search
for Sunkon
Treasure



#26 The Mummy
with the Mummy



#27 The
Christmas Toy
Factory



#28 Wedding
Crashers



#29 Down and
Out Down Under



#30 The Moon
Island Marathon



#31 The
Mysterious
Cheese Thief



Christmas
Catastrophe



#32 Valley of the
Giant Skeletons



#33 Geronimo
and the Gold
Medal Mystery



#34 Geronimo
Stilton, Secret
Agent



#35 A Very Merry
Christmas



#36 Geronimo's
Valentine



#37 The Race
Across America



#38 A Fabulous
School Adventure



#39 Singing
Sensation



#40 The Karate
Mouse



#41 Mighty
Mouse Killersaurus



#42 The Peculiar
Pumpkin Thief



#43 I'm Not a
Supermouse!



#44 The Giant
Diamond Robbery



#45 Save the
White Whale



#46 The Haunted
Castle



#47 Run for the
Hills, Geronimo!



Meet

CREEPELLA VON CACKLEFUR

I, *Geronimo Stilton*, have a lot of mouse friends, but none as **spooky** as my friend **CREEPELLA VON CACKLEFUR**! She is an enchanting and **MYSTERIOUS** mouse with a pet bat named **Bitewing**.

YIKES! I'm a real 'fraidy mouse, but even I think **CREEPELLA** and her family are **AWFULLY** fascinating. I can't wait for you to read all about **CREEPELLA** in these **!a-mouse-ly funny** and **spectacularly spooky** tales!



#1 THE THIRTEEN GHOSTS



#2 MEET ME IN HORRORWOOD

Don't
miss these
very special
editions!



THE KINGDOM
OF FANTASY



THE QUEST FOR
PARADISE:
THE RETURN TO THE
KINGDOM OF FANTASY



THE AMAZING
VOYAGE:
THE THIRD ADVENTURE
IN THE KINGDOM
OF FANTASY

THANKS FOR READING,
AND GOOD-BYE UNTIL OUR
NEXT ADVENTURE!



Thea Sisters